1: Childs M-S (1924-1940) 1940 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

heavy tasks and the close and constant routine of housework, on the other hand, sometimes require more than casual urging by the mother. Biographical evidence agrees with observation on this point, but nevertheless few girls reach puberty without attaining proficiency in the various household tasks. The decline of polygyny has probably hastened the girl's education in the household arts. When there is only one wife in the household, not only must she have more regular help from her daughters, but also it is more likely that the daughters will have to take on full responsibility at those times when the mother is unable for ritual reasons to take part in the preparation of her husband's food.[1] Biographical sources indicate that this tendency was already operating at least fifty or sixty years ago.

Every Ocimbundu assumes that his sustenance will come from cultivation of the soil. The 'professions' which a child may learn are therefore in the nature of side-lines. Although the Ovimbundu are not a true cattle-rearing people, they possess many domestic animals, especially dogs, pigs, sheep, goats, and chickens. Chickens are owned and looked after by both men and women, but the other animals only by the men. Boys may have small stock of their own, and a boy's economic independence most frequently begins with owning a chicken. Herding has been a function of the sister's son and even now there is reluctance on the part of boys to herd for their fathers. Animal husbandry is largely a commercial enterprise, save in the extreme southern tribes of Kalukembe, Ngalangi, &c.

The principal side-line 'professions' (*ocipinduko*) may be listed as follows:

For Girls

Basket-making, which is practised by all to a limited extent, but excelled in by relatively few.

Pottery-making.

Medical-practice and Divination (for conditions, see *infra*).

For Boys

Mat-making, which includes the making of four distinct types of mats each of which has its specialist; the making of trays and large baskets for granaries.

[1] I.e. at the times of her menstrual periods, after the birth of a child, &c.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

833 chiefly for marriage. Indeed, marriage is the beginning of adulthood; no Ocimbundu is considered fully an adult until married.

841 Where the initiation camps have not taken hold, i.e. among the great majority of the people, it is the father's sister (*apahâi*) whose duty it is, at least in theory, to tell her brother's daughter how she should take care of herself during the times of menstrual flow. Actually a girl generally learns such things from observation and from girls of the immediately superior age-group, her sisters and cousins. She will not need to be told that during those times a girl or woman must not even touch anything belonging to a man and especially she must have nothing to do with preparing his food. This period is known as 'sitting on the ground' (*oku tumâlâ posi*) since that is what a woman is supposed to do at that time. Modern usage has also taken that phrase to mean 'unemployment'.[1]

582 In the house which the boy or young man has built for himself, one of the most characteristic customs of adolescence among the Ovimbundu takes place: the trial marriage. There are several Umbundu names for this custom, as *oku tumisa* (lit. to cause to send), referring to the fact that the young man sends a male friend or relative both to ask permission of the girl's mother and also to bring the girl each night to his hut. Names for the correlative but all-inclusive custom are *uponji*, the girl being called *eponji*; and *uvaini*, the girl being called *ombaini*. A young man may first *tumisa* at about seventeen to eighteen years of age, but he must have acquired enough to make small presents to the girl and to her parents and he must have or have in prospect money or goods sufficient to make the betrothal payment.[2] This payment is known as *itambelo*, 'enticements', or *oku lupula ikuelume*, 'chasing away jealousies'. This indicates that the custom of *uvaini* is definitely regarded as a prelude to marriage. For this reason, the term 'trial [856] marriage' is preferred to that of 'premarital sexual intercourse'. The nature of the intercourse, moreover, is carefully circumscribed. 'When the respective parents have agreed, then those of the girl will warn her saying, Should that boy be bad, and want to play with your cloth, even though it be late at night, run away.'[3] In such a case the boy's parents would take him to task and require that for the time being he sleep in their kitchen and so under

[1] For early notice of this cf. Magyar, op. cit., p. 284.
[2] From 10,00 to 30,00 *Angolares* according to locality, family, status, &c.
[3] From a manuscript dictated by R. Kahupetoka of Ngalangi.

787 A detailed description of the procedure of divining is given by Tucker. In brief, the basket (*ongombo*), which contains a wide variety of objects, is ritually prepared, and the diviner goes into a kind of trance which calls the spirit of the basket to him. As he starts shaking the basket, he asks it first why the clients have come to him (since they may not ask him directly), and when he has ascertained this, questions the spirit about the cause of the trouble. The chanted replies of the audience (consisting, apparently, of outsiders as well as the clients) assist him in making the divination. The divination is finally given from the juxtaposition of the objects which settle on top of the pile in the basket.[1]

Especial care is taken of the divining basket when not in use. Some diviners build a special *etumbo* or spirit-hut for the basket; others keep
● [841] it hidden in their own house, where it may be seen only by the wife of the diviner, and only when she is not menstruating. Tucker gives a long description of the contents of the divining basket and illustrations of some of the objects.

791 At the death of a diviner, his son inherits the *ongombo*, but only if he can master the secrets of the basket and pass the tests which are given during his initiation into the profession. In addition, he must be "called" by some omen or illness which a diviner interprets as the wish of an ancestral spirit that he should become a diviner.[2] If he does not have these qualifications, the basket goes to someone who does, and the son receives no recompense. In either case, two years of training are usual for the would-be diviner, during which he is apprenticed to an established member of the profession. In this period he may learn
[754] *ovihemba* (medicines); their preparation and their uses to cure or kill. In order to provide the female counterpart to the spirit of the divining basket, he might formerly invite a girl to spend the night with him. In the morning, he gave her a magically treated cloth which caused her illness and death; her spirit would then be able to assist the one he already had.

The *olombumbo* or "servants of the basket" are youths who carry the accoutrements of the *ocimbanda* and wait on him; they also provide their master with much information about the community, and during divination closely observe the clients and assist the *ocimbanda* by shouting loudly when he has made the right answer. They are also believed to have mystic powers, *e.g.* to see and reveal what is going on at a distance, or to go into a trance during which the spirit of the basket may speak through their lips instead of through the basket. Tucker gives no information concerning the identity of these boys; possibly they are the diviner's apprentices, although she does not suggest this.

787 "The Ovimbundu refer all communications from the spirit world, whether by omen, portent or illness, to an *ocimbanda*....The requisite behaviour is determined according to the answer given by the combination of pieces in the *ongombo* [divining basket], which is thus the key to the

(1) The contents of the basket and the ritual which surrounds it appear to be almost identical with the practice of the western neighbours of the Ovimbundu described in another section of the Survey. (McCulloch, 1951, pp.91-3)
(2) It is not very clear whether the spirit of the basket is that of its former owner, or whether it is some non-ancestral spirit.

3: Hambly E-6 (1929-1930) 1934 FF13 Mbundu FF13

of the girl by her husband, and if she were not a virgin he took a hot stick from the fire and burned a hole through her loin cloth. "The girl began to cry, but she had to take the burned cloth to her mother." In such an instance there does not seem to be an idea of guilt. The husband had accepted something that was damaged, and the payment of a pig by the girl's parents reunited the two young people. In former days, also at present, there are boy and girl companions who sleep together, supposedly without having sexual connections, although they may be seventeen years of age. The girl calls the boy *omboini*, and he calls her by the same name. The Ovimbundu understand something of the physiology of conception; the woman is, however, regarded as only a receiving vessel. "The man puts something into her which grows." 585 [836] [842]

Husband and wife do not sleep in the same bed during the wife's menstrual period; the wife sleeps on a mat at the side of her husband's bed. A woman who is menstruating never cooks food, but women give mutual aid in this matter. A man with more than one wife sleeps either four nights or seven nights with each; the four-night cycle is more usual than the seven-night cycle among the Ovimbundu. Each wife has a separate hut and kitchen. There is no wife lending, but a visitor may be provided with a widow or even with an unmarried girl. Then the man would have to pay the woman. 841 595 937 [514]

Nguuga was able to give information with regard to homosexuality. "There are men who want men, and women who want women." Nguuga says he has heard people talk about it, and "they think this very bad." A woman has been known to make an artificial penis for use with another woman. The medicine-man will sometimes dress as a woman. Nguuga, who has seen a man dress as a woman, stated that the man arranged his cloth like that of a woman, put palm oil on his hair, and joined the women to pound corn on the rocks. "The other people laughed and spoke bad words to him. His brother, father, and uncle beat him," but without producing reformation. 938

DIVORCE

There are many grounds on which a man may secure a divorce, but it does not follow that divorce is frequent. On the contrary the evidence indicates that the majority of difficulties are overcome by a compromise between the relations of the husband and those of the wife. The main causes of dissatisfaction with a wife are want of ability in cultivating her garden, physical weakness, a habit of thieving from the gardens of other women, incompetence in cooking, 586

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbunda FP13

of this symbolism relating to occupations of males and females 842
respectively, is obvious.

Many women bear children when they are away in the fields, but 844
help at home is often given. The mothers of the wife and of the husband may not be present at the confinement. No childless woman may be near during the confinement or convalescence. The father may not be present or "the child would be ashamed to be born." Before and during her pregnancy a woman feeds her husband with a prickly plant which is mixed in his food; this makes him faithful to her. [784]

The abdomen is bound after delivery in order to keep the uterus in position. There is a very small amount of bleeding after childbirth; in fact the flow of blood is quite finished in two or three days. The nearer the diet comes to that of the white man the greater the bleeding at delivery. A pregnant woman may not beat a drum, or she will bear a drum. A woman who sees the blood from circumcision of a male will not have any children.

When a female child is born, the umbilical cord is cut with a hoe to ensure that the female will be a good worker in the field. The cord of a male is cut with an arrow to insure good hunting. A newly born child receives a drink of beer, and a cord is tied round its waist. This is not for support; it is the string from which, much later, the lower garment hangs. Girls do not menstruate until they are fifteen 841 ●
or even seventeen years of age. During the months after first menstruation a girl advances rapidly from childhood to womanhood.

The medicines that women take to secure abortions are bitter. 847
A woman will refuse quinine because she thinks it will cause abortion. It is certain that twins are welcome among the Ovimbundu, but there 845
are special observances connected with their birth and death. A twin birth is not thought to imply dual fatherhood. Twins are called Njamba ("elephant") and Hosi ("lion"). Although twins are of opposite sexes each receives one of the two names. Njamba is the first born, and Hosi is the second to be delivered. The medicine-man holds a ceremony to cure the mother of twins. The afterbirth of twins is placed in two gourds and carried outside the village for burial by two midwives. The mother of twins must wear round her neck the horn of an antelope given by the medicine-man. She has to blow this when crossing a river, meeting a crowd of people, or seeing a hawk overhead. People laugh at her and in fun say that she is a pig or a bitch. "The woman says the same kind of words to them." Children may be adopted, but they never really 587

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

597 belong to the foster parents. When an adopted girl marries, half the presents from the husband are given to the natural parents, and the other half to the foster parents.

845 In a case of triple birth at Ngalangi two infants died at birth; the other succumbed after three months. In another instance a woman bore three children and in the vernacular of my informant "something which was nothing," but all died. In a third case of triple birth a woman had a boy and two girls. The boy died at the age of fifteen [826] years; the girls grew up and bore children. Albinos do not find it easy to obtain wives. I was told that an albino man at Ngalangi could not find a wife until he married a widow who had several children, because unmarried girls of his own age did not want him. One of the charms collected has to be worn by a woman who has tripleta. The object is a rattle (*olusangu*), which the woman shakes when she meets any one. If she gave an ordinary greeting the children would die.

115 The greater part of this information was obtained at Ngalangi by interrogating women who were questioned in Umbundu by Mrs. McDowell. At Elende I asked my interpreter Ngonga to interrogate 843 his wife. According to Ngonga a woman must visit a female practitioner in the first month of her pregnancy. The face and the body of the pregnant woman are painted with red, black, and white spots. This means that she will have no difficulty in bearing children, neither will she have any sickness during the nine months of gestation. "When her belly hurts" (i.e., the quickening), the woman goes to the same female *ocimbanda*, who paints lines of white, red, and black across her breast.

751 The *ocimbanda* gives the woman a necklace consisting of a strip of leather to which two cowries are attached. Experience proves that such a necklace is difficult to buy. If the woman has a necklace of this kind which was worn by her grandmother, it is a very powerful aid to conception, a relief in painful menstruation, and a means of securing easy delivery and normal gestation. I could not find any trace of an idea relating to the entry of a soul, ancestral or otherwise, into the foetus.

•841 *Ongonda* is the name for a disease of the genitalia; but Ngonga used the word to describe abdominal pain suffered by a woman who has had no children. By this I suppose he means painful menstruation. The curative root which is given is called *kayambua*.

847 Abortion is never secured by mechanical means. The medicine (*ikenda*) is made from the root of a plant that is boiled in water and

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

drunk. The concoction is described in Umbundu as *themba vioku tundisapo imo* ("medicine to take away belly"). 847

When the monthly period begins too early in life, the medicine-man recommends that the young girl should wear the cowrie necklace worn by her mother's mother. 841 ●

A deformed child is destroyed, but not if it has been allowed to survive the first day. 847

If male triplets are born, two stay permanently with the mother. At the age of five years one child goes to the king, whose child he becomes. 851

When a woman has had relationships with more than one man, she will die in childbirth unless the medicine-man is called to cure her. 837

In a Vachokue village of eastern Angola I bought a female wooden figure. It was explained that this would be nursed by a woman, one of whose twins was dead, in order to induce another conception. Moreover, the nursing of the figure prevents the death of the second twin. The Ovimbundu also use these wooden figurines for replacing dead twins (p. 163). 532 845 842

Children are suckled for a long time; even those of three years and older come to the breast. There are instances in which milk is present but lacking the nutritive qualities; then the baby is likely to die. The matter is simpler when a mother gives no milk at all because the baby is given to another woman, but not necessarily to a woman who is suckling a child. A baby whose mother has no milk may be given to a woman who has not borne a child for many years, and the sucking of the child quickly induces a milk supply. This is agreed upon by informants at Ngalangi and Elende who have seen a child nursed by a woman with withered breasts. Protection is given to the fontanelle by covering it with a vegetable gum which hardens. 853

Near the chief village of the Vangangella at Ngalangi there is a mound decorated with feathers and painted wooden posts (Plate XCII, Fig. 1). Childless women are placed on the mound which is near a river. They are covered with mud, after which the medicine-man sings songs and administers potions. The women go home and are made to sit on mounds in their kitchens. These mounds, which are made in rows, like earth heaped up after hoeing a trench, may be a symbol of successful agriculture and human fertility. 842 789

On looking into the subject of blood brotherhood I found that an exchange of blood between two males who swore mutual fidelity was at one time common. At the present day an exchange of blood is 608